

**REGION II**  
**REGIONAL MENTAL HEALTH BOARD, INC.**

**Testimony of Kristie Barber, Executive Director**  
**Region II Regional Mental Health Board**  
**Vice Chairperson, Keep the Promise Coalition**  
**March 25, 2013**

Good Afternoon Senator Musto, Representative Jutilla and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. I am Kristie Barber the Region II Regional Mental Health Board, and I am here today to speak in favor of Section 1 of **HB 6670** An Act Concerning Supervised Absentee Voting, Applications for Absentee Ballots and Duties and Responsibilities Assigned to Moderators. Being located on the Connecticut Valley Hospital (CVH) campus and having many members of our volunteer committees living and advocating in Middlesex County this has a particular interest to us.

If this is passed by the Committee the same rules would apply for voting by absentee ballot for any person who needs inpatient psychiatric care and is served in a general hospital to individuals who are inpatient at one of the three DMHAS hospitals. Current state law defines the hospitals as "institutions" and because this was defined years ago, it is an outdated concept and the institutional setting does not apply in the same manner. Currently, if someone is in one of the three DMHAS hospitals and wants to vote they can only do so supervised by someone from the Registrar of Voters office in the town in which the hospital is located. People who want to vote and are inpatient on a psychiatric unit of a general hospital do not have the same restrictions and can vote by absentee ballot without supervision. As a result, current law creates an inequity for individuals with psychiatric disabilities who need a different level of care than a short hospitalization stay. I think in fairness to the individuals who are in the longer term state hospitals they should have the opportunity to vote like any other individual who is away from their residence, by absentee ballot.

Being on the campus and talking with patients gives me a different perspective of what it must be like to not be able to go home every evening as I am able to do. I think that it is important for a person who is at CVH to feel that recovery is possible and setting goals to get back to their community is important. Voting is a right that is important to all citizens and I feel that if someone is an inpatient at a psychiatric hospital (no longer called an institution) it is even more important for a patient to not feel "different" than any other citizen who can use the absentee ballot process. I encourage you to accept the language provided Section 1 of HB 6670 and allow patients to vote by absentee ballot instead of supervised voting.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

**Spoken**  
**3/25/13**